

Manager develops enviable database

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SCHWEINFURT, Germany - A customer's work order request begins its journey with a phone call to the Directorate of Public Works (DPW), where an employee enters the request into a computer, so that it can be shuttled off to the appropriate division for attention.

This process plays out in the USAG Schweinfurt DPW roughly 25,000 times a year. One work order is a miniscule piece of information in the Integrated Facilities System (IFS) that Gert Saar, chief of the DPW management information systems branch, uses to track the costs, steps, and details of everything that the several hundred DPW employees do each year.

"Most people say it's a pain, but DA (Department of the Army) wants us to do business like a corporation, and if you want to do that, you have to identify costs for your activities," Saar said, explaining how he and his team use IFS to manage Activities-Based Costing (ABC).

"We are the only ones that have a running system," he said, adding that evaluators from DA and IMA-Europe regularly hold his example up as the model for other communities and directorates to follow.

The bottom line, so to speak, is that, under ABC, the Army wants to know exactly how much money an activity or service costs. And the numbers should be comparable among garrisons throughout the Army.

"No matter where you go, there are certain things that you're going to see. How much does it cost to run these programs, these common levels of support?" said Frank Hernandez, USAG Schweinfurt Program Analysis and Integration Office director. Although other communities and directorates are expected to use IFS to track services and performance, USAG Schweinfurt DPW is ahead of the pack, according to Saar and Hernandez.

"We're not the only ones that have it. We're the only ones that have been able to design it, to develop it, to implement and fully incorporate it in the entire DPW directorate," Hernandez said.

Having launched IFS more than four years ago, thus avoiding a backlog, Saar and his team spend less than one minute per day entering data into the IFS system. He advises other managers to pick up the ball.

"It's coming. There will come a day when they have to have something running there. I would advise them to think about how they can set up a database where they can record the time they spend on an activity," Saar said. Hernandez agreed, in light of the current military mission.

"As the war continues we're going to be facing an austere budget environment. And we're going to have to start making some tough decisions about what services do we really need to keep the community happy. That's going to be a challenge," he said.